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ABSTRACT

School faculties are complex social communities consisting of countless social interactions that weave the larger web of social relationships. Collective observations of 16 teachers and the author, in an Indiana elementary school over 1 year, identified several distinct forms of social encounters: affirmations are interactions that, while serving to develop and maintain social relationships, can be used to avoid deeper social commitments; onlooking behavior allows the onlooker to interact from a distance with little of the risk associated with more direct participation; tutelar social encounters place one participant as an expert and others as learners; directive situations create a hierarchy, distribute political power among those involved, and deny participants a role in knowledge creation; involvement in parallel tasks allows freedom to pursue individual interests while retaining the capability of interacting with others; individual social thoughts are responses to the larger, yet not physically present, social community; cooperative social behavior enables a task to be assumed and completed that otherwise (alone) would have been difficult; collaborative interactions reconstruct participants' perceptions to include those insights generated as a group. As educators come to understand and value learning as a social process, the potential for reconceptualization of self-perceptions as teachers and the act of learning is being realized. (KM)

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Teaching/Learning in a Social Community: A Taxonomy of Social Interactions Among Elementary Teachers.

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Teaching/Learning in a Social Community:
A Taxonomy of Social Interactions Among Elementary Teachers.

Terry McDanial, principal at Spencer Elementary School, stands along side the faculty mailboxes flipping through a stack of papers that have accumulated in his cubby. It is 7:45 a.m. and a steady flow of teachers breeze into the office area to collect their mail. Some of the teachers grab their mail as they pass the boxes and are out the door and gone. Others unbutton their coats, put their bags down and leisurely sort through their correspondence, saving some and discarding the rest.

As each teacher enters the office Terry greets them. What is immediately apparent is that Terry greets every teacher differently. Some get a friendly, "Good morning," or "That was quite a game last night!" Terry initiates conversation with others that seems to be a continuation of a previous unfinished discussion. Other teachers open discussions with anecdote from the classroom or perhaps a request. Still others are greeted with good natured jibes that are usually followed by quick retorts. Within a span of fifteen minutes Terry has greeted more than ten teachers, and no two greetings are the same.

What accounts for Terry's differentiated behaviors? We know that the context in which an event occurs affects and shapes the interaction. However, when context of situation is viewed as nothing more than a place, time, and event it does not adequately explain Terry's interactions with the teachers. In this instance, the time was shortly before school, the place was in the mailbox area of the school

office, and the event was greeting the teachers. Yet, each greeting was unique. In order to understand Terry's varied interactions, we must consider that Terry shares a history with each of the teachers. It is this personal history that Terry, or any person, shares that sets the broad parameters of what will be seen as possible, acceptable, and desirable interactions. A social relationship exists between any two people, and is taken into account whenever they interact. No two people are treated alike, because no two people share the same social relationship.

If we are to understand the 'culture' of a school we must understand the the social relationships that grow and change in that culture. In this paper I will develop a taxonomy of social interactions that delineate the day to day transactions that take place among teachers and administrators in an elementary school. This taxonomy was developed through the collective observations of sixteen teachers and myself in a year long collaborative study at Spencer Elementary School, Spencer, Indiana.

We do not interact with one another in autonomous pairs, but rather in larger social communities. Therefore, a school faculty becomes a complex social community consisting of countless social interactions which weave larger webs of social relationships. Nevertheless, when two or more people come together, or even think about one another, a social event happens. Social interaction can be viewed from the broad sweep as a social relationship, to the specific event as a social encounter. In this essay I take a micro look at social sharing by examining social interaction from its smallest whole unit -

a social encounter. I then step back to consider its relationship to social sharing in a larger context.

My interest in social sharing reflects my interest in learning. If we can better understand how social sharing operates, then we can use that understanding to invite participation and to support one another as learners. In this essay I draw from our experiences as learners at Spencer Elementary School. While the participants are all adults, I believe they share much in common with learners of all ages. That is, learning viewed as a social phenomena operates the same across all learners.

From Macro to Micro Social Interactions

Social interaction is a difficult process to conceptualize because it can not be isolated from the context which it creates. To better understand this process, so I could think and talk about social interaction, I found it useful to look at it through three different lenses - social interaction as social relationships, as social events, and as social encounters.

In its most macro perspective social interaction might be viewed as a relationship. A social relationship encompasses the broad set of social conventions and expectations that emerge as a result of the participants' personal and shared histories. It reflects the previous experiences the participants share and it establishes broad possibilities for how the participants will continue to interact

with one another. As the social relationship evolves, new possibilities for interaction come into existence while existing possibilities fade away. Just as we are not the same person from one day to the next, our relationships with others change as well. Understanding social relationships is important to the educator because it is in their power to profoundly affect the social relationships they hold with their students, with their colleagues, and among their students. If, as I believe, learning is a social phenomenon, then dynamic social relationships are not icing on the cake, but the cake itself. Social relationships hold the key to what, how much, and how well we will learn.

Social relationships are comprised of multiple social events. A social event represents an episode within a social relationship that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Two teachers who planned and presented a proposal to the faculty concerning intentionally mixing age levels on the playground for recess would be an example of a social event. Over a period of time the teachers met to share their concern that by segregating the students on the playground they were being denied the opportunity both to develop friendships across age groups and learn how to cooperate with children older and younger than themselves. The two teachers shared professional articles about child socialization, and brainstormed the possible objections to changing from an age segregated playground. They planned their strategy for presenting the proposal and shared the responsibility for the actual presentation at the faculty meeting. While these two teachers entered this social event with a social

relationship intact, the event itself impacted on how the two teachers would interact. Therefore, even though under other circumstances one of the teachers might have been viewed as more experienced or perhaps the mentor within the relationship, this social event allowed the two educators to take more equal roles in searching out the best strategy to present their case. As a result of this social event the broader social relationship has been enriched to allow for a wider range of social interactions in the future. Both social events and social relationships are part of the same whole, and therefore, mutually shape one another.

Social events are comprised of social encounters. A social encounter is a single instance of social interaction. It is at this most micro view of social sharing that the spectrum of possible social interactions can be best viewed. For it is here that the complexity of the event or the relationship is momentarily suspended to highlight the characteristics of the specific encounters. In the next section we will look at the types of social encounters that we recognized within our interactions as we worked and learned together.

Types of Social Sharing

While the process by which we learn is the same, and the cultural rules by which we operate are by and large mutually understood, there nevertheless exists great diversity in how social interaction is played out. In this section I will address the types of

social sharing we recognized within our group as we functioned as a community of learners. Each type of social sharing holds promise as a building force in creating and maintaining a dynamic and generative learning community, and yet each also has the potential of avoiding or thwarting meaningful interaction. The effect of a social encounter is realized not in the encounter itself but within the event and relationship that encompasses it.

Affirmative

Affirmations are social interactions that serve to make and maintain social relationships.

> *Bonnie is struck by how much excess energy her second graders have today. In order to help them burn some of it off she takes her children out to recess a few minutes early. She knows that in the long run they will accomplish more in the classroom if the children are relaxed. A few minutes later, she is joined by Susan and her children. In greeting Susan, Bonnie asks, "Is it me or the kids today?" Susan replies that her children are also very active today.*

The surface question being asked by Bonnie in some respects is not a question at all. Given that the participants in this exchange are two teachers, there is only one socially acceptable answer, and Susan gives it. However, the question was not without purpose. What the question did allow was for Bonnie to make social contact with Susan,

and to imply the rationale for her decision to bring the students out a few minutes early. Susan's response, although on the surface was directed toward her own children, was to affirm that Bonnie's observation of the students was accurate and that her course of action was appropriate.

While the affirmations in this story are one level below the surface, that is not always the case. Greetings, talk about the weather, smiles or nods etc. affirm that a social relationship exists and is being maintained. When affirmations are withheld a strong message is sent in their absences that the one party is upset with the other - the cold shoulder.

Affirmations function to maintain existing social relationships and can lead to further, more interactive engagements. But affirmations can also be used to avoid deeper commitments. Educators find themselves together in the office before school, at recess, lunch, and faculty meetings. They stop to chat in the hall. Each of these represents a potential for these learners to engage in meaningful dialog, but those who want to avoid commitment, choose to live behind a screen of affirmations that fill the verbal void with socially acceptable dialog without getting to issues of substance or without taking risk. In this respect affirmations work to keep learners at a safe distance and to a large extent keep learning at bay.

On Looking

On Looking is a social encounter that allows participants to interact at a distance with little risk associated with more direct participation.

I became aware of a teacher in Nashville, Tennessee who wanted to set up pen pals for her students with an out-of-state classroom. Rather then waiting for a research group meeting, I decided to share this opportunity with the participating teachers by posting the invitation on the message board. This bulletin board, which was strategically placed in the teachers lounge, served as a communication link between all of the participants in the study and the faculty in general as well.

The following day I received in my mail box a message from Peggy Zonkle. Although she was not a member of the study, she had read the posted invitation and was interested in having her children correspond with pen pals. I went Peggy's room after school. We talked about the pen pals and how they might be coordinated. I told Peggy I was pleased that she had read the message board and had responded. Peggy told me that she was interested in the study and that she had debated whether she could afford the time to participate. She said that now that the school year was well underway she would like to become active in the study.

As I began to explain to her what the study was about and what we were currently doing as a group, I became aware that I was not telling Peggy anything she did not already know. Although Peggy had not been attending the meetings she was knowledgeable of what had been discussed and had several suggestions for topics we might explore further. Peggy had not been directly involved in the study but from her perspective she was in fact involved all along.

On Looking allows learners to participate at a distance. By not having direct contact with the group, risk and commitment of more overtly active social interaction is minimized. While On Looking is not direct involvement with others, it is an active personal process. Peggy was interested in the group. She kept up with what we were doing. She gave the insights we developed critical consideration. Peggy was, without our knowing it, a member of our learning community.

Those learners that feel most comfortable as 'on lookers' can take on a more active learner role within a group of learners if that group recognizes and values On Looking as one of many legitimate alternative social interaction. Our message board was placed in the teachers lounge so that ALL educators in the school would have access to it. Our meetings and invitations were open to any interested person, and we advertised them throughout the school through personal contacts, notes in the mailboxes, and announcements through the public address system. Our intent was to ease the shift for new participants from On Looking to more engaging forms of social sharing.

Although On Looking is a social encounter, and therefore a potential for learning, it comes from a position of silence. If the learning community is a closed association, resistant to accepting new members, then the 'on lookers' are deprived of voice should they wish to participate more directly. Whether the group keeps outsiders out, or whether they choose not to participate themselves,

the learning community would be enriched by the addition of onlookers.

Tutelar

Tutelar encounters casts one participant as learner and the other as expert.

> *Susan enrolled in a summer class at Indiana University where she was introduced to the concept of whole language. She saw a lot of potential for this perspective in her own teaching. Susan was particularly interested in getting a writing program going that would really excite her second grade children, and whole language seemed to hold some promise. Susan knew that Peggy Schrougham, also a second grade teacher, had some expertise in whole language and had elements of it operating in her classroom. Susan approached Peggy about helping her learn more about this philosophy and how it is put into practice. Peggy agree, and over the course of the year Peggy shared what she was doing and her rational for doing it. Susan visited Peggy's classroom several times and frequently asked questions about how to get whole language operating in her own classroom.*

Susan was aware that tutelar social interactions are an expeditious strategy to learn a specific identified body of knowledge. Susan was interested in improving the learning environment in her classroom. Whole language seemed to be a promising concept. She found a person that held the knowledge she wished to know, and invited her to establish a learning-teaching event. In this social event Susan's role was to learn more about whole language, and her

questions therefore were directed at understanding the concepts, both at an informational level and at a critical level.

While Susan chose to go to a person, tutelar interactions are also initiated with authors through books. By in large, educational trade books are structured to present a body of knowledge in a comprehensible organization. With few exceptions their focus is 'here is something you should know.' For learners who are aware of specific knowledge they wish to understand, tutelar interactions provide a time efficient process to learn about and critique new ideas.

The value of tutelar interactions in efficiency of time is realized at the expense of generativeness. Tutelar interactions are at best reflective - 'what is new, and were does it fit with what I already know?' As a result of this process, the learner comes to look more like the teacher. If this newly acquired knowledge is to become the grist for generating new knowledge the learner will have to move on from Tutelar interactions to more generative ones.

Although Tutelar interactions have value, they silence the learner's voice. Its hierarchical structure is designed to pass knowledge from the person holding the knowledge to the person with a void in knowledge. A Tutelar interaction does not recognize, and therefore does not take advantage of, the notion that all participants in social sharing are learners. So, not only do the recognized learners risk a loss of voice, the recognized teachers, by not sensing their own role as learner, overlook an opportunity to learn with and from their students.

Directing

Social encounters characteristic of Directing distribute ownership and political power hierarchically among the learners.

> *Early in planning this study I knew that I needed frequent personal contact with the participants. I decided that journals would be an ideal structure to accomplish this. At our first meeting I proposed the idea of keeping journals. I explained that this would be voluntary but would help me very much. The initial reaction by the teachers was enthusiastic, and I was hopeful that this would prove to be a valuable source of data for me. The teachers had quite a few questions. "How often should we write?" As often as they liked. "What should we write about?" What ever interested them. "Should we use a notebook?" That was fine, but I would provide spiral notebooks.*
>
> *My intent was to get them to explore the potentials of what a journal could do for them as learners. I believed that it had to be valuable to them and work for them if it was to be good data for me.*

In this social encounter I had a need. I wanted a continuous flow of rich data from the participants. I decided that the best available source would be through journals. I brought my request to the participants, softened by the reminder that participation was optional. This was a quick, efficient procedure that met my needs, and I hoped would meet the participants needs as well. I had directed the participants to consider keeping a journal.

Much of our lives, both in and out of our professions, are involved in directing or being directed in social interactions. These

interactions may be relatively open (e.g. Here is a problem. How will you solve it?) or controlled (e.g. Here is what needs to be done, and here is how you must do it.). In either case, the social/political organization is hierarchical with subordinates responsible to the director who in turn owns the process.

A Directing social interaction is particularly efficient at getting tasks accomplished, but that efficiency comes at a cost. By directing others, they are denied ownership and participation in the creation of knowledge.

Clearly, the proposition to write journals was mine. The teacher's questions reflected that observation. They wanted to know exactly what 'I' expected of them. While they asked a number of questions, they were all questions of clarification of what I wanted. If any of the participants had alternatives to my preconceived notion of collecting data, they did not share them. If they chose to keep a journal it would be 'the journal they are writing for Dave.'

Parallel Events

Parallel Events are social encounters where each learner works in full knowledge of the presence of the others.

> *Bonnie walks her children to the gymnasium for physical education class, and then heads to the teacher's lounge where she will wait for her students and get some work done as well. In the lounge Linda is sitting with scratch paper and xerox sheets stacked in several small*

piles across most of one of the two tables in the lounge. I am writing in my journal sitting at the end of the table Linda is using. Bonnie sits at the other table, opens a file folder which contains several stories written by her students. Bonnie has been very pleased with the children's interest in writing this year. They see themselves as writers and want to publish books. During the next half hour Bonnie plans to edit the rough drafts the children have given her.

At my table Linda is reading xeroxed copies of Thanksgiving plays. As she reads a play she sketches on her scratch pad. Linda put her sketches for each play on the pile for that play.

While the two women work, their is no indication that either person is aware of the others in the room. Then without notice Bonnie says, "Listen to this," and she reads a section from the story she is editing. Linda and I laugh and then work silently for a few minutes longer. Next, Linda breaks the silence by asking, "Do you think the kids could handle four plays if they worked in groups." Bonnie asks what the plays are about, and concludes that if the kids were mixed, so that there were good readers and responsible kids in each group, it might work. Both women work in silence for the next fifteen minutes.

Each of us had quieter places to work if we did not want to be disturbed, but chose nevertheless to 'hang out' in the teacher's lounge. As we worked we were not unaware of each others work, nor were we uninvolved, as the surface structure might appear. We each sensed an audience and shared when it was important. I found that from time to time I drifted away from what I was writing to think about what the others were doing. Rather then being interrupted by the others, I was interrupting my own thought process to become a part of theirs.

As learners in Parallel Events we are freed to follow our own interests and needs while at the same time stepping in and out of other learners' thoughts. Because learning is a social process it is not surprising that learners like learning together, even when they are involved in totally different tasks. When insight or problems arise the learners involved in Parallel Events have the support of others. While they are working on their own agenda they are also learning about other agendas. And, by working in close physical proximity, the learners are building a social relationship that invites more interactive social encounters to develop.

While there is a potential in Parallel Events for learners to move toward more interactive social encounters, Parallel Events in themselves invite only minimal social involvement. If the social/political structure does not allow the learners to go beyond parallel events, as in the case of many school classrooms, then much of the generative quality of social sharing is unrealized.

Individual

Even when participants work alone they are aware of, and respond to, the larger social community to which they belong. In this respect they are interacting with and responding to the larger, yet not physically present, social community to which they belong.

Each Friday in Sharon's and Leah' kindergarten classroom is craft day. The children visit the craft table

in groups of five or six and make a craft appropriate to the season, holiday, or current topic of study. Recently, the children made cellophane and construction paper stars, and ice cream cone ornaments to decorate the classroom for Christmas.

As Leah goes to meet the morning busses and gather the kindergarten children together for the walk across the parking lot to the kindergarten building, Sharon sits down to brainstorm a list of crafts to do on Fridays during January. She thinks about the crafts they did last year and writes them down. Then she adds to the list ideas she has read in current issues of educational magazines. Evaluating her list, she wonders which items Leah will like. She imagines how the kids will respond, and rejects several that are either too complex or too messy. She thinks about how they might be displayed in the room and how they will look to visitors. She also considers how the parents will react to the craft when the child brings it home. Sharon stars severai items on her list which she will suggest to Leah later in the morning.

Even though Sharon was working alone she was still immersed in a social community. The decisions she made were based not only on her personal experience but on her perceive notion of the experiences of many other people in her social community as well. These multiple perspective allowed Sharon stand back and view each proposed craft from several different vantage points. In this regard Leah, the children, the parents, and visitors to the classroom all had a part in determining which crafts would be the most appropriate.

While learners may be physically isolated they can still intellectually connect to all other learners in their social community. To write a letter is to have the receiver sitting in your minds eye. To plan a trip is to consider the needs of those you will take along. To think through an argument is to step into and out of the minds of

those persons standing on either side of the issue. To reflect on your own action is to step outside of yourself for a look back in. As social learners we do not close shop because no one is around to think with us. We bring our colleagues along. In this respect we continue to develop social relationships even in the absence of the partners in that relationship.

Interactions of the Individual type are social because they are couched in other engaging interactions, and their value can only be weighed in light of the richness of the total social relationship that exists. Sharon ability to anticipate the parents' reaction to various crafts was not because of her skill of thinking and learning alone, but because she had had many previous social interactions with the parents. While learning in isolation is social, it is only social because the learner brings a rich engaging social history to the solo learning event. Classrooms where children are expected to learn in isolation, without the benefit of rich social interactions, have little to make those isolated learning events social and dynamic.

Cooperative

Cooperative instances of social interaction operate to partition resources and responsibilities among the learners.

> *Eric and Heidi were interested in providing more choice within their curriculum for their team taught fourth and fifth graders. They felt that if their children were given the opportunity to direct their own learning*

within the content areas the curriculum would be naturally individualized, and the children would feel more control over and responsibility for their own learning. The problem, as they saw it, was to develop a curricular structure that would allow opportunity to explore freely while still sampling from a wide spectrum of experiences. After considering several alternatives, they settled on a curricular organization that consisted of a Fine Arts strand and a Research strand.

The Fine Arts strand approached the content areas through art, music, drama, and literature. Experiences with, and creation through, the arts was the focus of this strand. Students read and wrote stories, poems, and scripts. They produced plays, songs, and dances. And they expressed themselves in paint, and sculpture. Through this strand, the children were to get an appreciation for the arts as a form of expression.

The Research strand focused on exploring, planning for, and seeking knowledge. Students were to learn the skills of enquiry through self selected topics using in-school and out-of-school resources along with observation and experimentation.

Heidi and Eric were each responsible for half of the children and one of the two strands. For several weeks they worked more or less autonomously in their long narrow double room. They met regularly to work out details of space needed for specific activities, or to coordinate a noisy activity with a time that the other group would be out of the room. Both groups worked toward a culminating activity where they would share their work with the other group and the school at large as well. This culmination celebration also demanded a great deal of coordination.

Eric and Heidi cooperated to develop a curricular structure that put into practice several educational beliefs that they shared. Through this cooperation, each of their roles was developed along with a set of expectations for the children and a scheme for how the classroom space and time would be coordinated. Responsibilities

were delineated and within a broad set of guidelines both were free to pursue their respective tasks.

A Cooperative social encounter is an enabling process. A group of learners take on a task collectively that would have been difficult or impossible to do alone. By members accepting responsibility for specific parts of the process they can devote their attention to accomplishing it while other members work on their own assigned tasks.

In school settings where administrators allow teachers a hand in curricular decision making, much of what is accomplished is done through Cooperative social interaction. Educators sit down face to face and work out scheduling conflicts. They participate in various committees charged with planing and carrying out social, curricular, personal, and community functions.

Cooperative social interactions allow participants to get on with the work at hand. By mutual agreement, each has an assigned task to accomplish and is assured some level of autonomy in accomplishing that task. While these social interactions are enabling, it is not without cost. Cooperative social interactions work to segment tasks and isolate learners by differentiating their responsibilities. Participant interaction is valued only as an organizational function to assign roles. In some instances social interaction may also be valued as a sequel to the process of constructing knowledge, where the participants regroup to share what they have done or learned. In neitner case is social interaction viewed as integral to the learning process itself. In this respect the

generative value of learners working together to create a shared understanding is missed. Social relationships that rely largely on Cooperative social encounters may function smoothly, and all participants may be contributors, but unless the learners find ways to create meaning together as social learners, they continue to learn in isolation without benefit of the generative value of their social community.

Collaborative

Collaborative social encounters are democratic, social interactions in which participants share responsibility and ownership, not for the assigned part of the whole, but for the entire enterprise itself. As collaborators participants bring varied backgrounds of experience to share, discuss, and create new shared understandings. The creation of knowledge is seen as a generative social process that i facilitated by rich social interaction.

> *Trish and Amy met at Wendy's Restaurant for a working Saturday lunch. Now, four hours and three diet Cokes later Trish joked that if they didn't get things wrapped up soon this would turn into a working dinner as well. Their task for this afternoon was to plan their first classroom open house. Although they had both taught for several years at the school in various grade levels this was their first year as team kindergarten teachers.*
>
> *The idea to invite the parents into the classroom came from their observation that while they received wide support from the parents they felt that many of the*

parents did not understand the philosophy underpinning what they were doing in the classroom. They felt that if the parents understood that their five and six year old children were learning how to read and write by reading real print and writing with real purposes in the classroom the parents would feel more comfortable supporting the reading and writing process at home.

Their task for this afternoon was to plan an experience for the parents that would demonstrate both this philosophy and how they had put it to practice in the classroom. They then would extend those ideas to reading and writing in the home. Neither Trish nor Amy had the answer to how they would develop these ideas and get them across to the parents. They needed each other to work through this process.

Because the focus of this open house was on the development of language, especially reading and writing, they began their discussion by talking through ideas on how to explain the functions of the writing/publishing center and the reading center. This proved frustrating because the writing process usually began some place other than the writing/publishing center. Children playing at the sand table needed road signs for the cityscape they were building. Others need a grocery list before they could shop at the classroom store. Messages needed to be posted so that other children would realize that the paint on the picture was wet and it should not be touched or moved. Many of the stories the children wrote were generated out of the the creative play they were involved in. In order to explain the writing/publishing center, all the options in the room would have to be explained.

The reading center proved no less integrated into the entire classroom. Reading was integral to many of the experience centers - charts, signs, instructions, and labels guided the children through activities. Books were not only found in the reading center, but throughout the room. A collection of fall artifacts included not only leaves, acorns, and seed pods; it also included books about fall. When the designated parents put their brood of children to bed in the dress-up center, they read from a book brought from the reading center for the bedtime

story. In a classroom where language is integrated throughout the curriculum, a discussion of language necessitated a discussion of everything else that happens in the room.

Amy suggested that they also invite the children, so that the children could give the parents a hands-on tour of the classroom. Trish thought the idea was great, but wondered if the parents would see the significance of 'playing in sand' and 'dressing up.' They realized that they had time to do some video recording in the classroom before the open house. Therefore, they could get a sample of the children participating in a variety of activities. Then they could use the video to share with the parents how working and playing together supports language development.

Trish felt that it was also important for the parents to get a light dose of the theory behind what they were doing and felt that a game or activity format would work well for this.

Amy felt that the parents should leave the open house with a few ideas in mind on how they could support their children's growth in reading and writing.

They began sketching out possible time schedules and responsibilities for the evening's activities, and finally developed a plan that orchestrated most of what they wanted to accomplish in activities that actively involved both the parents and the children.

They would have the children show the parents around the room and encourage them to actually participate with their children in the activities. Next they would show the video of the activity period and stop the tape when appropriate to highlight the significant learning experiences available to the learners as they work and play together in a language rich environment. Next, they would do an activity with the parents that demonstrates that language instruction based on real language in a meaningful context supports comprehension and learning, while fragmenting language into letters and sounds is inherently complicated and incomprehensible. Finally, they would lead a discussion with the parents about the types of reading and writing experiences that are available to all children in the home.

If they were successful, the parents would go away feeling comfortable both about what was going on in the classroom and about what they could do at home to support their child's development as a language user.

Trish and Amy were pleased with the program they had planned and also amazed that as a result of thinking through the presentation of their curriculum, they came to understand and appreciate at a deeper level the interdependence of language, learning, doing, and sharing.

Trish and Amy viewed themselves as learners, not in the static sense of receivers of knowledge but as dynamic creators of knowledge. Pooling their respective backgrounds, coupled with their current interaction, they constructed a plan that exceeded either person's expectations and in the process came to understand their own curriculum better. Not only was a open house planned, the very curriculum they set out to explain became the focus of change and re-creation.

Collaborative social encounters are predicated on a belief that learning is a social phenomenon. It goes far beyond receiving knowledge or even creating knowledge. As collaborators we explore and restructure our own world in light of the insights we generate together. Through this process we create new lenses from which we can look upon our known world in a new way.

While collaborative encounters are highly generative they are also very demanding of time. In the course of a day it would not be possible to collaborate in all social encounters, nor would it be desirable. Within the larger scope of Trish's and Amy's social relationship, there exists a variety of pragmatic demands such as

time, interest, expertise, and experience that suggest other appropriate social encounters. While collaborative encounters are valued as highly generative social interactions, they are but one of many alternate types of social interactions available to all learners.

An Orchestration of Social Encounters

While this taxonomy proved useful in labeling, classifying, and thinking about individual social encounters, social events and relationships proved to be more elusive. Every social event and all social relationships are an interwoven web of social encounters. These webs of social encounters are comprised of a variety of types of social interactions, therefore they all have common qualities. When learners interact over time they engage in many of these social interactions. Although this sounds as though all social events and relationships are the same, we know that they differ greatly.

Some relationships such as casual acquaintances and co-workers who do not share task responsibilities are very superficial and seem, by design, not to get beyond pleasant greetings and 'safe' conversation. These relationships or events may be powered primarily by Affirmation, Individual, On Looking, and Parallel Tasks. This described the relationship of many of the teachers at Spencer Elementary School. Teachers that shared the same hall and yet taught different grades often found that they got to know one another on a superficial level, but did not work together and did not

know very much about each other's beliefs about teaching and learning, nor did they know much about what went on in each other's classrooms. While they might consider each other friends, the depth of that relationship was carefully choreographed not to intrude on controversial territory. A social relationship that operates primarily out of these types of social encounters can be described as a Casual Social Relationship.

Other relationships seem to be powered by a hierarchy of authority such as the relationship that might exist between a supervisor and employee, principal and teacher, or teacher and students. While these relationships and events share the social encounters of the more casual relationships they are also designed to get a task done by controlling the behavior and learning of some participants by those who hold the power. For this reason these relationships also depend on Tutelar and Directing social interaction. Common to many classrooms is the teacher who is viewed as the dispenser of knowledge. As a trained professional the teacher controls the social interactions within the classroom so that the students remain on prescribed tasks that present knowledge and reinforce skills in which the students are deficient. This is accomplished through Directing and Tutelar interaction. In this type of classroom the Tutelar and Directing social interactions are the focus not only of teacher to student encounters, but of student to student encounters as well. So even when students are paired to work together this teacher will assign a 'capable' student to work

with a 'less capable' student. This type of social relationship might be described as a Hierarchical Social Relationship.

Some social relationships and events are characterized by a more democratic or equalitarian perspective. Each participant is viewed as a contributor and is afforded some measure of responsibility in planing what they will do and what they will learn as a result of this. These relationships might be described as Cooperative Social Relationships because in addition to a rich mix of the types of social encounters discussed above this type of social relationship or event focuses on cooperative social encounters. The teaching faculty of a school often operates in this fashion as do some classrooms. These teachers recognize that in order to become a self directed learner one must have some control and responsibility over the process itself. These teachers provide opportunities for their students to take on self directed learning experiences. This may be in the form of independent study, where the child develops a focus based on personal interest, develops questions, seeks answers to those questions and in some manner summarizes and shares those understandings. Characteristic to a cooperative social relationship is that each participant has a clearly defined role that specifies a specific set of rights and responsibilities. It is assumed that if each participants accepts and fulfills these expectations then the entire process will operate smoothly.

Still other social relationships and events seem to generate new insights and knowledge as a result of the participants working together, sharing responsibility and ownership of the process itself.

These relationships can be described as Collaborative Social Relationships. In recognizing and valuing learning as a social process, collaborative social encounters constitute the key social interactions within these relationships. Collaborative relationships exist among educators as they move from hierarchical and cooperative relationships to collaborative relationships as trust, commitment, and shared ownership are developed. While collaborative relationships between teacher and student are relatively rare in schools today this is beginning to change as educators come to understand and value learning as a social process. Some teachers are now beginning to view themselves as co-learners in the classroom. The questions they are asking are not intended to interrogate, but rather to explore. They are participating as readers and writers in author's circles and literature circles. They plan with and not for the children in their classroom. They accept and value children's diverse interpretations of the world. And, they create environments where taking intellectual risks are valued as the grist for new thought and insight. Children are not viewed as incompetent neophytes to be shaped in our adult image, but rather as complex social individuals who are in the midst of the continuing process of figuring out the world by actively participating in it. To be human is to be a learner in social communities. As we come to value ourselves as learners and supporters of learning in others, we become collaborators. Valuing learning as a social transactive process holds monumental potential for the reconceptualization of our view of ourselves as teachers and the act of teaching/learning itself.